

### NDSU Agriculture Principal Investigator (PI) /Project Director (PD) Role Policy

This policy defines eligibility and responsibilities for serving as a PI or PD on projects administered through the NDAES, NDSU Extension, or the CAFSNR. It ensures consistency with federal regulations, funding agency requirements, and NDSU policies for sponsored research and extension activities.

#### Institutional Accountability

Only individuals with continuing NDSU appointments and delegated signature authority may assume ultimate responsibility for sponsored projects. All proposals must be routed, **thoroughly reviewed, and approved** at each administrative unit (department, REC, or center), the NDAES Director's Office, and Sponsored Programs in RCA to ensure compliance and authorization.

#### Principal Investigator (PI) / Project Director (PD) Role

A PI or PD is the individual designated by NDSU Agriculture as having the authority and responsibility to lead and direct a sponsored project through its completion.

NDSU applies the same definition outlined in USDA-NIFA Policy Guide (July 20, 2023) for PDs:

*NIFA uses the term Project Director (PD) to refer to the individual responsible for leading and directing all types of projects – research, extension, and education. The organization applying for a NIFA grant (the applicant organization) may designate multiple individuals as PDs who share the authority and responsibility for leading and directing the project intellectually and logistically. Each PD is responsible and accountable to the grantee organization (or collaborating organization, as appropriate) for the proper conduct of the project.*

#### PI/PD responsibilities include leading the following:

- Project conception and design: Developing objectives, methodologies, and deliverables.
- Budgetary and fiscal management: Ensuring proper use of funds and compliance with sponsor and institutional policies.
- Implementation and oversight: Executing the research, extension, or educational activities; supervising personnel; and managing facilities and equipment.
- Reporting and dissemination: Meeting all sponsor reporting requirements and communicating outcomes and impacts.
- Compliance: Adhering to federal, state, and university requirements for research integrity, safety, and civil rights.

#### Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) / Co-Project Director (Co-PD) Role

- A Co-PI/Co-PD shares authority and responsibility with the PI/PD for one or more of the duties listed above. A Co-PI/Co-PD may also serve as a co-investigator who contributes substantially to at least one major component of the project. All Co-PIs/Co-PDs must have clearly defined roles and remain accountable to NDSU.

Position	May Serve as PI (without exception)	May Serve as Co-PI (without exception)
Tenured/tenure-track faculty	Yes	Yes
Non-tenure track research professors, and professors of practice faculty.	Yes <sup>a</sup>	Yes <sup>a</sup>
Employees with an approved Experiment Station project (Hatch/multistate/state)	Yes	Yes

Directors of service units (e.g., VDL, NCI, REC)	Yes	Yes
Extension specialists/agents, Extension program coordinators	Yes	Yes
Main Station research specialists	No	Yes (with PI/PD from above) <sup>a</sup>
REC research specialists, VDL section heads, Experiment Station specialists	No (unless nominated/ approved by REC/VDL Director) <sup>b</sup>	Yes (with PI/PD from above) <sup>a</sup>
Postdoctoral personnel	No (except as allowed under federal RFPs) <sup>c</sup>	Yes (with PI/PD from above) <sup>a</sup>
PhD students	No (except as allowed under federal RFPs) <sup>c</sup>	Yes (on internal, commodity board, or state-funded projects under faculty supervision) <sup>d</sup>
Graduate and undergraduate students	No	No
Visiting and adjunct faculty	No	Yes (with PI/PD from above) <sup>a</sup>

### FOOTNOTES

**a.** Personnel eligible to serve as PIs or Co-PIs who are supported by grant dollars (e.g., research professors, scientists, postdoctoral fellows) must include salary commensurate with effort in each proposal and obtain written approval from their direct supervisor.

**b.** The REC or VDL Director may determine whether personnel possess sufficient authority and responsibility to serve as an independent PI/PD. The position description must explicitly include independent research expectations, and the nomination must be submitted to the NDAES Director's Office prior to proposal submission.

**c.** Federal RFP Exception for Graduate and Postdoctoral Programs: Graduate students and postdoctoral personnel may serve as PIs or Co-PIs on federal competitive grants (e.g., USDA-NIFA AFRI Predoctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships, NSF Graduate Research Fellowships, NIH F-series awards) when the funding announcement is explicitly intended for them. In these cases, the university must provide institutional approval and the faculty advisor must serve as an authorized mentor or sponsor as required by the RFP.

**d.** If a PhD student is included as a Co-PI, the unit grants coordinator must notify the unit leader to confirm that the student has a legitimate and academically relevant reason to serve in this role. PhD students may be listed as Co-PIs on internal, commodity board, or state-funded projects when:

- The primary PI is a tenured/tenure-track faculty member or approved research professional who retains full fiscal and reporting responsibility;
- The student's participation is integral to their graduate research program;
- The faculty mentor provides written approval to the grants coordinator before submission and agrees to supervise all fiscal, technical, and reporting activities; and
- The department head and NDAES Director's Office approve the arrangement before proposal submission.

This option promotes professional development and leadership in applied research while maintaining institutional oversight and accountability.